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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

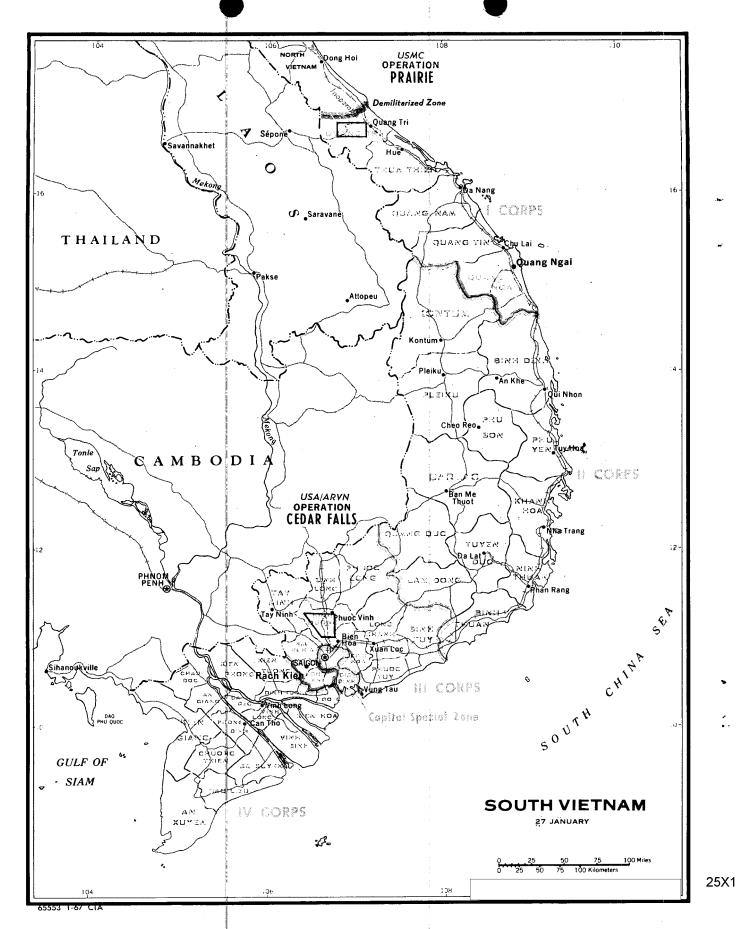
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	Information as 1600 27 January 1967	25X1
	HIGHLIGHTS	
•••• :	General Cao Van Vien, chairman of the Joint General Staff, has been appointed South Vietnam's new minister of defense in place of General Co.	
ti o	I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: Four US Marines were killed and nine wounded while on patrol in Quang Ngai Province (Para. 1). Three American helicopters were destroyed and one damaged in northernmost Quang Tri Province on 26 January (Para. 2). The successful three-week-long Operation CEDAR FALLS ended on 26 January (Paras. 3-6). The security situation in Long An Province has been greatly improved since the introduction of American troops into the province (Paras. 7-10).	
	II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: General Cao Van Vien is the new minister of defense (Para. 1). Chief of State Thieu toured the delta this week in what appeared to be a presidential campaign junket (Paras. 2-4).	
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	IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.	
, j	V. Communist Political Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.	
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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

- 1. A US Marine light observation aircraft was shot down by Communist ground fire on 26 January about 23 miles southwest of Quang Ngai city in coastal Quang Ngai Province. A US Marine company deployed to search for the downed aircraft encountered an enemy force of undertermined size early the following day. With the support of artillery and tactical air strikes, the marines killed nine enemy soldiers while losing four killed and nine wounded. The pilot of the aircraft was found dead but the two other crew members, who were wounded, have been recovered.
- 2. A US Marine reconnaissance team participating in Operation PRAIRIE encountered an estimated 40-man Communist unit in the mountainous, monsoon-soaked jungles of northernmost Quang Tri Province near the Lao border at dusk on 26 January. Heliborne reinforcements were attacked by enemy ground fire, which was responsible for the destruction of three large US helicopters and damage to another. The marines held their position during the night and following the enemy withdrawal after daybreak additional helicopters were able to land and bring out the marines. American casualties were light with five reported wounded. There was no report of enemy losses.

Operation CEDAR FALLS Ends

3. The largest ground operation of the Vietnamese war--Operation CEDAR FALLS--ended on 26 January with a toll of 720 Viet Cong killed and 722 taken prisoner. This vast sweep operation--at times employing as many as 25 US and South Vietnamese Army battalions--was designed systematically to locate and destroy the Viet Cong force and infrastructure which for many years has dominated the Iron Triangle area of Binh Duong Province north of Saigon. American casualties for this operation, which began on 7 January, were 72 killed and 377 wounded. A total of 1,238 tactical air strikes and 96 B-52 missions were flown in support of the operation.

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- 4. In addition to the high enemy personnel losses, a record 3,710 tons of rice were captured and hundreds of tunnels, caves, and bunkers destroyed or rendered useless. Large amounts of munitions, medical supplies, training aides, and military equipment were also destroyed.
- 5. In an effort to render this area of Binh Duong Province completely useless to the enemy, more than 6,100 South Vietnamese peasants were evacuated from their homes in Viet Cong territory during Operation CEDAR FALLS and transported to a relocation camp. These displaced persons are eventually to be given land and assistance in building new homes.
- 6. Before CEDAR FALLS began three weeks ago, more than 2,200 Communist troops were believed to have been operating in the Iron Triangle area--in-cluding three battalions of the 165A Viet Cong Regiment, which has previously been identified as participating in sabotage and terrorist attacks on Saigon and the surrounding area. Many thousands of documents were seized by allied forces, but their contents will have to be fully evaluated before precise identification of the several demolished enemy head-quarters sites can be made.

Security Situation in Long An Province

7. The performance of a battalion of the US 25th Infantry Division assigned to Long An Province since November to assist in pacification work has already brought some benefits to the province. The battalion has demonstrated that, contrary to what many had feared, deployment of US forces to a heavily populated Mekong Delta area does not necessarily result in high civilian casualties. Nevertheless, problems in improving the security situation in Long An continue to exist and will probably not, in the estimation of US officials, be remedied without the introduction of additional friendly forces.

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8. The initial US battalion dispatched to Long An in late September 1966 encountered many difficulties and withdrew in November without significant results to its credit; its replacement battalion, however, has achieved considerable success.

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The most notable accomplishment of the replacement unit has been the retaking of Rach Kien village, a once-thriving community of approximately 3,000 people which was completely abandoned to the Viet Cong in October 1965. The battalion has opened the road connecting Rach Kien with National Route 4--the main land artery linking Saigon and the delta--and is providing security against future Viet Cong encroachments in the hope that village residents who fled during the Viet Cong take-over will return.

- 9. The dismissal--under US prodding--of Long An's corrupt, ineffective police chief has resulted in improved police morale, greater effectiveness in population and resources control operations, and increased police recruitment and training activities. In addition, a corrupt district chief in the province was recently removed and replaced by an energetic ARVN major, who has already brought about a slight improvement in his district's security.
- 10. Despite these hopeful signs, the Viet Cong continue to operate at will in many areas of Long Most of the province's 28 outposts are vulnerable to attack, although such attacks in recent months have been largely unsuccessful. Revolutionary Development Cadre teams often will not remain overnight in areas they are pacifying because they fear Viet Cong attack and, even in "secured" areas, some hamlet chiefs will not remain at night because they fear assassination. In fact, much of the progress claimed by the province in the pacification field exists only on paper, as district officials often report successes which have not actually been achieved. Additionally, Long An continues to suffer from a lagging Chieu Hoi program, understrength and poorly trained Police Field Force units, and an almost complete lack of coordination between the province chief and the commander of the ARVN 25th Division.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

General Cao Van Vien has been appointed as the new minister of defense in place of General Co. Official word of Co's replacement came after a Directorate meeting on the morning of 27 January. In addition to his new duties, General Vien will retain his position as the chairman of the Joint General Staff. There was no hint in the government communiqué that the military leaders have yet decided what to do with Co, who remains in Hong Kong. Such potential sources of unrest among civilians as the southern regionalists, or even the militant Buddhists, appear so far to be unwilling to make an issue of this latest high-level personnel shift which may increase northern refugee influence within the military establishment and the government.

Chief of State Thieu Tours the Delta

- 2. While Premier Ky was still making his generally successful tour of Australia and New Zealand, chief of state General Thieu, visited the delta in a manner highly suggestive of a presidential campaign. During his four-day trip, Thieu spoke at various military installations as well as at the University of Can Tho, donated money to wounded soldiers, and promised land titles to over 100 families.
- 3. In view of the prospect of presidential elections, the potential military candidates are starting to act like presidential hopefuls, even though they have publicly—and in Thieu's case, privately—disclaimed interest. Informal assessments of the respective support for Ky and Thieu suggest that their chances to become the military candidate are about even. Foreign Minister Do recently told the US Embassy political counselor that Thieu is a stronger candidate than Ky, and that Ky would have to defer to Thieu if the latter should decide to run.

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